

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Tom Rooney (R-FL), with Reps. Tim Walz (D-MN), Chellie Pingree (D-ME) and Jeff Denham (R-CA), last week introduced bipartisan legislation to ensure that veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) cannot be denied the benefits they have earned due to a misdiagnosis by the Department of Defense (DOD).

The “Servicemembers Mental Health Review Act of 2012” requires the DOD to review and correct the records of veterans who were discharged – many wrongly – on the basis of a Personality Disorder or Adjustment Disorder. Many of these veterans actually suffer from PTSD or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). However, because Personality and Adjustment Disorders are considered preexisting conditions, the Department is not obligated to provide these service members with the full benefits they would have received with a PTSD or TBI diagnosis.

“We have veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury as a result of combat or sexual assault that happened while they were in the military, but because they were wrongly diagnosed, they can’t get the benefits they need and deserve,” Rooney said. “The Department of Defense needs to go back, reassess these evaluations, and make the necessary corrections so that our wounded warriors can get the support they earned.”

A 2008 report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that 26,000 soldiers were improperly discharged with personality disorders between 2001 and 2007. Based on a review of several hundred cases, GAO indicated that compliance rates were as low as 40 percent. The Servicemembers Mental Health Review Act requires the Secretary of Defense to review the more than 30,000 personality disorder discharges that have occurred since 2001.

“I am concerned that service members who are improperly discharged with personality or adjustment disorders will have a difficult time reintegrating back into civilian life,” said Walz, the bill’s sponsor. “Action must be taken to correct the military records and provide these wounded warriors with the disability, healthcare, and economic opportunity benefits they have earned.”

Steve Nardizzi, CEO and Executive Director of Wounded Warrior Project, explained, “For warriors separated from service based on inappropriate psychiatric labels, this bill would establish a much-needed remedial avenue for records-correction and benefit eligibility. Erroneous ‘personality or adjustment disorder’ designations have barred too many warriors with PTSD from getting needed help.”

Rooney serves on the House Armed Services Committee and is the co-founder and co-chair of the Military Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Caucus.

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